

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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SUBJECT: FOOD SUPPLIES: DUSHANBE, APRIL 30

SUMMARY. DURING APRIL 29-30 VISIT TO TADZHIK CAPITAL OF DUSHANBE, EMBOFF WAS ABLE TO GET COMPLETE (AND GLOOMY) PICTURE OF FOOD SUPPLIES IN THIS MOST REMOTE OF SOVIET REPUBLIC CAPITALS. THERE HAS BEEN A SEVERE SHORTAGE OF MEAT AND DAIRY PRODUCTS IN DUSHANBE FOR NEARLY A MONTH, AND NO SIGN OF RELIEF IS IN SIGHT. LOCAL CITIZENS ATTRIBUTE THE SHORTAGES TO DISASTROUS WINTER WEATHER IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS AND A CONSEQUENT SIPHONING OFF OF FOOD DESTINED FOR DUSHANBE TO THE MILITARY. END SUMMARY.

1. OUR SOURCE FOR FOOD SUPPLY INFORMATION WAS AN AMERICAN STUDENT AND HIS WIFE RESIDENT IN DUSHANBE SINCE SEPTEMBER 1975. THEY REPORTED THAT MOST OF WHAT LITTLE MEAT THEY SAW IN APRIL WAS FROZEN, AND SOME OF THAT WAS PARTIALLY THAWED AND SPOLING. WHEN PORK DID APPEAR IT WAS FATTY, AVAILABLE CHICKENS WERE USUALLY SCRAWNY. FROZEN FISH WAS OFTEN AVAILABLE, AT R 1.20/KILO. DURING THE INFREQUENT PERIODS WHEN MEAT HAS APPEARED, THE FOLLOWING AVERAGE PRICES OBTAIN: BEEF, R 2.20, PORK, R 2.20, (RELATIVELY) FAT CHICKENS R 2.50, SKINNY ONES, .60, MUTTON R 2.00.

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WM BUTTER HAS BEEN STEADILY AVAILABLE, AT R 3.50 PER KILO, AS HAVE TWO GRADES OF FLOUR AT VARYING PRICES. SUGAR CUBES HAVE REMAINED PLENTIFUL AT R 3.50 PER KILO, BUT LOOSE SUGAR AT .75/KILO APPEARS INFREQUENTLY ON THE MARKET. IT WAS NOT FOR SALE WHEN WE WERE IN DUSHANBE. THERE ALSO WAS NO RICE AT THAT TIME; WHEN THERE IS, IT SELLS FOR R 1.60 PER KILO. COOKING OIL IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE. WE LEARNED, HOWEVER, THAT MILK, EGGS, CREAM AND YOGURT HAVE BEEN IN SHORT SUPPLY FOR A MONTH AND NO ONE EXPECTS ANY IMPROVEMENT SOON.

3. OTHER PRICES: CARROTS, R 1 PER KILO; BEETS, .50; LETTUCE, .20 PER BUNCH; RADISHES, .20 PER BUNCH, ONIONS, R 1 PER KILO, POTATOES, R .70 - 1; CABBAGE, R 1 - 1.50; APPLES, R 1.50 - 3; POMEGRANATES, R 3 - 4 PER KILO, LEMONS, R .70 - 1 APIECE, AND LAST YEAR'S GRAPES, R 2.50 PER KILO.

4. COMMENT: THE DUSHANBE FOOD SITUATION, EVEN DISCOUNTING THE POSSIBLE SUBJECTIVITY OF THE SOURCE'S ANALYSIS, IS CLEARLY THE MOST SERIOUS OBSERVED BY EMBOFFS IN RECENT TRAVELS THROUGHOUT EUROPEAN RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA. DUSHANBE IS THE MOST REMOTE REPUBLIC CAPITAL, AND WOULD VERY LIKELY BE AMONG THE FIRST TO FEEL THE PINCH WHEN SHORTAGES DEVELOP. THE EXPLANATION THAT HARSH WINTER WEATHER IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS REGION HAD DEVASTATED CROPS AND CATTLE HAD BEEN HEARD BEFORE. AND REROUTING FOOD SUPPLIES TO MEET HIGHER MOSCOW PRIORITIES IS NO NEWS EITHER. EVEN IN AN AREA OF RELATIVE PLENTY SUCH AS VILNIUS, RESIDENTS HAD TOLD US THEY EXPECTED SUCH DIVERSIONS WHEN THINGS BECOME TIGHT (MOSCOW 739). END COMMENT.
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